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SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: MILITARY RETIREES SURPRISE GOVERNMENT WITH  
AGGRESSIVE DEMANDS FOR IMPROVED BENEFITS; MOVEMENT OF CAMPS OUTSIDE  
OF MAIN CITIES

REFTELS: A) 06 OUAGADOUGOU 1159;  
B) 07 OUAGADOUGOU 0027;  
C) 07 OUAGADOUGOU 0807

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Beginning in October 2007, a group of retired and soon-to-be retired Burkinabe soldiers participated in unauthorized demonstrations to argue for increased benefits and retirement ages. The Government offered to reemploy retired military as civil servants and provide a fund for individual business ventures, but refused to increase retirement ages. The Government arrested several demonstration leaders, and later released them. As of early February, almost half of eligible military retirees had signed up for the new benefits, but a dwindling number of hardliners held another organizational meeting on April 13.

¶2. (SBU) Another source of discontent, this time for active soldiers, is a Government plan to construct new military camps in towns at a considerable distance from Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso. Some military personnel are upset that this move will separate them from their families. The plan is in part designed to reduce the possibility of coup attempts against the Government, and of violent clashes between the armed forces and paramilitary (gendarmes and national police), such as broke out in December 2006 between army and police elements in Ouagadougou. End Summary.

December 2006: Army-Police Shootouts Lead to Creation  
of Commission on Recruitment, Training, and Benefits  
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¶3. (SBU) In the immediate aftermath of December 2006 clashes between police and military in Ouagadougou that left several dead (refs A, B), a commission composed of high-ranking officers and military representatives was named to identify and resolve problems facing the armed forces. During these discussions, retired and soon-to-be retired soldiers presented a list of requests, which the commission left unaddressed until a second meeting held in mid-October 2007. A central complaint of these soldiers was that the current retirement age was too low to support families with school-aged children. Also important, many soldiers including officers, once retired from the military, lacked the training necessary to find skilled jobs.

October 2007: Retired Soldiers Surround  
Armed Forces Headquarters to Press Demands  
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¶4. (SBU) On October 7 and 9, 2007 soldiers led two demonstrations in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso to publicly announce their grievances in advance of the second commission meeting scheduled for mid-October. Although the demonstration in Ouagadougou did not turn violent, it was briefly tense, with a ring of mainly retired soldiers, some in uniform, surrounding the armed forces headquarters, and a second cordon of police surrounding the soldiers (ref C). The demonstrators called on the Government to:

- give pension credit for 2 years of service that were previously ineligible for pensions;
- extend the retirement age by 4 years for each service (current ages are 46 years for privates, 48 years for sergeants and staff sergeants, 48-54 for non-commissioned officers, and 54-60 for the senior officers);
- grant retirement allowances to the officers who retired in 2006; and,
- grant "reinsertion" (into civilian life) payments to those who retired in 2006, instead of beginning with those who retired in 2007.

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#### Government Response to Soldiers' Demands - President Compaore's Brother Mediates, Some Concessions Made

15. (SBU) In the light of these public demands by the retired soldiers, which embarrassed and angered some active-duty senior officers, the Government responded by opening negotiations. Demonstrating the seriousness with which the Government took the situation, Francois Compaore, the younger brother of President Blaise Compaore, mediated between military leaders and Government representatives to postpone a second round of demonstrations until at least mid-November.

16. (SBU) The GOBF then offered retired officers employment in civil service and in territorial community administrations. According to the Minister of Defense, around 3,000 former soldiers were to be recruited for civil service positions across the country. The government also agreed to establish a reinsertion fund for those retired officers willing to start income-generating projects in agriculture or livestock raising.

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#### Retirees Reject Offer by Government, Which Hardens Its Position, Arrests Leaders

17. (SBU) These proposals were initially rejected by many retirees and soon-to-be retirees, and the latter insisted on demands to postpone their retirement for an additional 4 years. The government, for its part, went ahead and started implementing its proposals, including registering participants.

18. (SBU) In January, in the face of the refusal of some demonstrators to abandon their demands, the Government took a harder line. It told the press that it considered the former soldiers' demands "legally groundless," and moved to criminalize future protests involving military. (The Government also arrested and later released several of the demonstration leaders, including finally releasing the top leader, Clement Ouedraogo, on April 4.)

19. (SBU) Also in January, a group of retired soldiers held a general assembly in Ouagadougou where they denounced: Government attempts at intimidation, the mediation of conflicts by the Mogho Naba (a local traditional authority), and the refusal of authorities to grant them access to the retirees' center to conduct their meetings. They vowed to continue to fight the Government and plan general assembly meetings. Although their ranks had thinned, they did hold another meeting on April 13.

110. (SBU) As of early February, 44% or 1,183 out of 2,700 potential beneficiaries had registered for the Government's new program. Soldiers interested in the reinsertion fund to develop businesses have begun receiving payments, according to an Embassy contact. In an April 4 meeting with officials from the Ministries of Defense and Transportation, retired officers complained that they were being offered jobs that they were unqualified for, or that were too far from their homes. Government officials promised to continue working on the issue.

#### Movement of Military Camps Outside of Major Cities: Another Potential Source of Discontent in Armed Forces

¶11. (SBU) In the aftermath of the December 2006 shootouts between army and police elements, the Government constituted a commission led by the gendarmerie (which had not taken part in the incidents) to look at ways to reduce the possibility of similar incidents, the head of the National Gendarmerie told us. One action taken soon afterwards was to inventory weapons in armories, and attempt to make them more secure from theft or attack. (Note: This commission may be the same one examining military retiree benefits. End note.)

¶12. (SBU) Another recommendation made by the commission was to move military camps further away from the two major cities of Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso. At present, there are plans to build facilities in Fada N'Gourma, Tenkodogo, and Kaya, with construction to start later this year. This move was intended to allow for growth, cut down on tension between military and paramilitary (gendarmes and police) and between military and civilians, and decrease the problem of military idleness (and resulting delinquent behavior affecting the surrounding population).

¶13. (SBU) Many soldiers already want to contest the plan to move the camps, which was obliquely referenced by Prime Minister Tertius Zongo in his March 27 "State of the Union" address before the National Assembly. Many soldiers prefer their current camps in or just outside of Ouagadougou because they can live with their families. Since families usually do not move when soldiers are transferred to new locations, the prospect of deployment to newly constructed camps has created unhappiness in the ranks, sources have told us.

¶14. (SBU) Comment: This initiative is also partly designed to reduce the possibility of a coup attempt or instability that might inspire one. The movement of camps to locations removed from Burkina Faso's two major cities could, for example, make more difficult future demonstrations like those that occurred in October to the extent that most active duty soldiers would be well outside of the capital. This move would also make Compaore's "praetorian" Presidential Guard less vulnerable to armed forces regulars.

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